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Fig. 152. Tattoo Artist at Work, Nkolentángan, Spanish Guinea.

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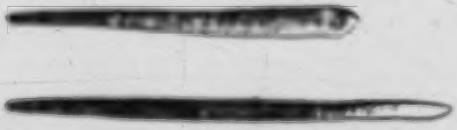

Figs. 153 and 154. Knives without Handles for Tattooing (ekut).

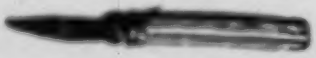

Fig. 155. Knife for Tattooing (bendolo).

1. Sexual Life before Maturity

561 156 Like Europeans, the Pangwe divide the individual's life into three sections, the period of childhood, that of adulthood, and that of old age. The last period, however, concerns the Negro much less than the first two periods of life, because on the average death occurs at an early age. Sexual maturity represents the boundary line between childhood and adulthood, and the Pangwe emphasizes it very much because sexuality is at the center of his religious conceptions and /252/ finds external expression through the initiation into the cults. This initiation corresponds to our confirmation. The Pangwe acts as though a person before sexual maturity -- for the sake of brevity I shall call this person a child (mə̀ngo III) -- represents a stage antecedent to actual manhood, mot III, just as, say, the caterpillar is the stage prior to the butterfly.

774 836 847 867 If we think back on what was said concerning the soul in the discussion of religion /Ed., not translated/, we remember that the Pangwe distinguish two kinds of people according to the kind of soul they possess: bebi'n (uninitiated, good), and bongüs (initiated, evil). Children (bə̀ngo) are bebi'n, uninitiated, good, because they do not know sexual intercourse and, if they have become acquainted with it prematurely, do not know that they are committing a sin; indeed, they could not know since, after all, they are not initiated into the profound connections between sexual intercourse, life, and death.

187 24 In reality the situation is such that the Pangwe young people are perfectly well informed, but officially each one must emphasize that he is a child, mə̀ngo, that is, good, unknowing, uninitiated as to sexual intercourse, even when he has long outgrown not only the actually innocent childhood (in the narrower sense), but also the period of sexual maturity. This point can be tested on any Negro between the age of ten and 20 years by asking him whether he already practices sexual intercourse. The answer will always be the same, be he a Fang from the bush or a Jaunde long since glossed over by a bit of civilization: "ma ne mə̀ngo (I am [672] a child, that is, innocent, I know nothing about sexual intercourse)."

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3. An expression frequently heard during our investigations was: "They had the same mvam, therefore they belonged to the same nd'ə̀ bòt."

succession confirms this fact by retaining in the collateral lines of descent only "first cousins" and paternal nephews (émò mwanéñâg, son of mwanéñâg) of the deceased. (4) Apart from the individual

4. Cf. M. Bertaut, Le Drout coutumier des Boulous [Common Law of the Boulou], chapter, "Successions," and L. Mba, Essai de droit coutumier pahouin [Essay on Pahouin Common Law], p. 39.

family which has no independent existence, it is in relation to this kinship that the most coherent and restricted grouping of Fang society, the nd'ə̀ bòt, is organized. This assures the cohesion of such a grouping but also contributes, in quite the opposite direction, with the relaxing of effective kinship, to the cleavages which occur frequently in the fourth generation.

612 601 561 Important distinctions should be marked on the same horizontal segment. First of all in terms of sex, between brother (ndum) and sister (kal). These two terms have a very broad meaning, since, according to L. Martrou, they may mean by extension "village brother" and "daughter [or girl] of the same village." (5)

5. L. Martrou, Lexique [Lexicon].

In terms of birth, children born of the same mother (of the same womb, abum avòri) form a distinct group called abumò bòt. No privilege however is [116] granted the siblings, this qualification most frequently being specified only by a periphrase, mwanéñâg abum avòri, "brother from the same womb." Above all, in terms of seniority, the eldest, ntòl or nyamòrò, takes precedence over the younger brother, ndzimò. This pre-eminence is fundamental and is of the same order as that which subordinates the generation

612 of mwanô to that of the ésa. The eldest son is not only almost
601 the exclusive heir to property — "he inherits at least seven tent'a," writes Mr. Bertaut — but he also has religious privileges. He is
561 the sole guardian of the skulls of ancestors, and he has political privileges, if he shows himself sufficiently able.

601 Within the maternal kinship the most important relations are
608 those between nephew (mwanô kal) and maternal uncle (nya-nduma). Of this we have proof in an early study of the Fang of the N'Djolé region, and in a recent document written at the time of a clan gathering which shows the maintenance of some of these relations. Captain Cureault (1) refers to them in a precise manner in his

1. Captain Cureault, "Monographie du secteur de N'Djolé au Gabon" [Monograph on the N'Djolé Sector in Gabon], Revue des Troupes Coloniales, 68, February, 1908.

monograph on the N'Djolé sector: "The relations between uncle and nephew are very close; during his life the nephew gives his uncle a great many presents to increase still further the price paid to his uncle for his mother. In the same way, whenever his nephew pays him a visit, the uncle kills a chicken for him, etc... as does the father-in-law for his son-in-law. ... If a poor nephew needs goods to pay for a palaver or to get married, he can go to his uncle, sure that he will receive help from him, even if he has not often given him presents. It is a supreme shame for a man to send away the son of his sister with empty hands." Maternal
F28 uncle and nephew have a share in the inheritance. An official report of the clan gathering of the Yémisèm-Éba still provides in 1948 for the "indemnity" due at the time of the death of a nya-nduma (a sum corresponding to the value of a woman and a sheep) and on the death of a mwanô-kal (a slightly smaller sum, "varying according to the size of the inheritance," and a sheep). (2)

2. Réunion de 25 villages de la tribu Yémissem a Afénane (District d'Oyem) du 12 an 19 Juillet, 1948 [Gathering of 25 villages of the Yémissem tribe at

562 except in a sporadic and very degenerate form; we mention the
715 N'nup with a whole string of "queens" that has appeared in the neighboring regions of Spanish Guinea.

562 This ambiguity in the position of woman to a certain extent
578 creates an equilibrium. On the other hand, from the point of
837 view of sentimental relations, this is not true. The man who admits that marriage should be regulated primarily in terms of social considerations hopes to obtain some day a "favorite" wife and has little fear of sanctions connected with adultery. The woman, married young, remains prisoner of the system and is always threatened with severe sanctions. Apparently this results in the many disputes which were referred to by the first administrators. "Very often the woman abandons her husband and returns to her parents' village or follows a man of her choice..." (Archives of Libreville, 1909). They were also referred to by the first Fang scholars: "The Pahouin woman does not hesitate to leave with a lover; often married against her wishes she avenges [152] this state of things by a very great infidelity" (L. Mba, op. cit.). The expression used by this author is significant. What might be called the sentimental excuse permits a broader reaction responding to frustrations of another nature. We must see there the sign of tensions which are actualized at the only possible level. Let us add that the conditions created by colonization will liberate these tensions to a great extent by destroying the equilibrium obtained approximately by traditional means.

561 These tensions are not the only ones to be mended. Between
578 generations, that of the fas and that of the mvandô, on the same
789 segment between the eldest and the younger brothers, it appears that relationships of dependency can turn into antagonisms. Soon
[35] after his birth the young boy is "marked" by his ascendants, receiving a double name (essential in relation to other denominations) which contains the name of an ancestor of his paternal line (of a mvam) and the first term of his father's name. In addition to individual interdicts imposed by his father, the child is subject to various general interdicts which are removed by degrees as the child becomes a man. Thus, there is the interdict on the pig (1), and on

1. The pig appears as a valuable animal

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in all this part of central Africa, where the ox is unknown because of trypanosomiasis.

the produce of hunting and fishing, and these exist until the time of puberty. They signify, according to L. Martrou, that in the family group there should be "no useless mouth," ..."but rather arms and hearts capable of defending and enriching it." (2) Thus

2. L. Martrou, Les "Ekis" des Mfang [The "Ekis" of the Fang] op. cit.

[834] it is forbidden to cohabit with a woman before being circumcized (3)

3. V. Largeau, op. cit. article: Interdit [Interdict].

541 578 [852 881] In the same way various rites mark the steps of this ascent: the rite of the Sob for the ten-year-old children; (4) circumcision,

4. M. Bertaut in his thesis on the Boulou of the Cameroons, a related nation, speaks of a less degraded form of the Sob which was the center of a true "society of men" now almost vanished.

which is not accompanied by any initiation (but seems rather to bear public witness to virility and to show the individual as an active male), and above all, the "revelation" of the Biéri. When 548 578 885 the young man joins the company of men, he has experienced in various degrees of intensity [153] this biological, social, and spiritual dependence on his ancestors (mvam) and on his elders (nyambé). To them he owes his life, his security, his social existence. Even after having crossed the various steps and being able to take full part in the assembly of men, he receives from

561 them various interdicts that testify to his new state and remind
578 him of the obligation to submit to those who have made him a
885 man, a complete Fang. (1)

1. Cf. M. Briault, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

561 For a long time he submits to this superiority of his elders,
885 who intervene with the ancestors, the source of prosperity and
888 power, who permit him to fulfill and increase himself by marriage and the possession of posterity, by controlling the circulation of bride prices and women. Thus the male life curve reaches a maximum which corresponds to the social influence of the nyamɔ̀rɔ̀, decreases as old age approaches (we have already stressed the tendency in the past to discard the "grandfather," mvam), and increases infinitely after death, which gives him the quality of "ancestor" with limitless power on behalf of the living. Childhood and old age, representing the "low" points of this curve, are preparation for the two "high" states which are characterized by an increase in power and autonomy.

561 In ancient Fang society dependence guaranteed material
578 and spiritual security. It was centered on the relation between
182 the begetter (ésa) and the begotten (émɔ̀ wân) rather than on that between the dominating one and the one dominated. We have frequently stressed the leveling tendency existing in the heart of the nd'è bɔ̀t and the dangers threatening any pre-eminence acquired by personal right. The just distribution of women, wealth, and tasks is expected from the "eldest," not any domination. In another respect, during the period of conquest, attempts at domination and the establishment of excessive personal power were limited by the important role of the "warrior" (who best incarnates the qualities which caused Dr. Cureau to compare the Fang to "modern Spartans") and the threats of rupture in the heart of a grouping which needed to remain sufficiently large and coherent. An equilibrium may arise between the power of the "eldest ones" (religious and political pre-eminence) and the power of the young men (martial pre-eminence). It involves particularly the rigid regulation of the circulation of the women, the possibility for these

561 young men to go beyond the level of simple dependence to be-
578 come, in their turn, creators of dependence, and the possibility
182 [154] of "capitalizing" human lives (women and descendants). This equilibrium has been upset and competition disorganized by the passage from warlike to economic conquest, then to an agricultural economy in which the woman plays a fundamental part, and the pacification which no longer permits the lack of women to be remedied by raids. Capitalization of women and capitalization of property are then bound together, the former becoming to a great extent the condition of the latter. The role of the "rich" man (nkumakuma) is increasing; (1) relations be-

> 1. To such an extent that Bertaut notes that among the Cameroons Boulou, who have been longer subject to a modern economy, there is only one word nkuma to designate the chief of village groupings.

tween generations, between "eldest sons" and "younger sons," may become that between possessors (women, property, and political role) and nonpossessors. Dependence tends to take on the characteristics of a domination creating tensions and conflicts.

784 We have been able to define a certain number of points of
626 equilibrium in the heart of ancient Fang society. We must now specify the important position held by the system of interdicts (biki) in social control. According to M. Briault the word éki (plural, biki) comes from the root ki meaning "force, restraint, virility, power"; it expresses a ritual prohibition, an interdict or taboo; it designates "a person or thing marked with a sacred character with whom or with which contact or use are forbidden." This author considers the éki essentially from the point of view of the restraint they exercise and of the social order which they help to maintain. He writes: "They give rather the idea of an effective means of keeping youth, women ... in short, all in the society who are made to obey, in a spirit of subjection to those whose will is of importance ... political interest is doubled and made

586 made, but this practice is only very rarely followed in cases of free
851 union, ébon, even when that is followed by a regular marriage of the
848 natural parents. Illegitimate children, fruits of an ébon, bobengon, are kept in their mother's clan, where, moreover, they rank socially only after legitimate children.

597 There used to exist a kind of adoption, rare today, of a political
614 rather than family nature, which could almost be defined as naturali-
611 zation. It could only be carried out by the head of an extended family on behalf of an orphan, mone nyui, of another clan (orphans within /56/ the clan being, of course, already considered children of the
[839] head of the family). The adopted child, abiaé môsô (i.e., "conceived in the daytime," sexual relations being lawful only between sundown and sunrise), came into the clan with a status analogous to that of the monengon. He remained subject to the marriage prohibitions of his clan of origin.

609 A non-Pahouin outsider permanently residing in a village, a ntabe,
614 may benefit through marriage by alliance, élat, which does not thereby make him a member of the clan. He becomes a monekal (sister's son, uterine relative) and his children, though legitimate, belong to their mother's clan.

583 The descent relationship may be broken by paternal or maternal
578 curse, meyo'é: the parent uttering the curse shows the child his sexual organs, "the place whence he came," while pronouncing a formula oath. The curse is supposed to bring misfortune and death to the offspring accursed, whom everyone avoids. It can only be
[783] lifted by a collective purificatory rite (étye, tyô) in which the whole nda bôt participates.

3. Age Grades

561 The individual's life cycle is marked by a certain number of transitions, which are accompanied, or were usually accompanied, by rites that will be discussed further on (p. 115). These crises are birth, weaning, puberty, attaining majority, marriage, death. Age grades correspond to the intermediate stages; they are less strictly defined today than formerly.

561 I do not know the exact word for fetus: people say abum, belly.
643 There must be a more precise term, but I think there is a prohibiton connected with it, certainly as regards men, although it may now be

no more than a mere conventional taboo, as with certain words considered crude in French. At birth and until weaning a baby is ntyen (nken) or nkeñelé.

After weaning, which usually occurs when the child begins to walk by itself, between eighteen months and two years, the nken becomes a mongô (mone fam • boy; mone minga • girl); an uncircumcised boy is called more specifically nsôôl.

Circumcision takes place between eight and twelve years of age (1), before the first premonitory signs of puberty, especially the

1. In former times it was sometimes put off until the youth had killed his first enemy. See Trilles (no. 166) and Largeau (no. 48).

appearance of the first pubic hair (afañ, related to the verb faŋ • to do well, correctly, on purpose, from the masculine root FA?). The circumcised boy, ntyi'an, "cut one," becomes an adolescent, ndôman, a term also meaning "son" (in relation to a man, see above, p. 63). Correspondingly, a pubescent girl becomes ngon (which can mean at the same time young girl, daughter of a man, or moon: ayene ngon, "to see the moon," that is, to be menstruating), or also élenan. /57/

The adolescent boy is still ébis, uninitiated. The missions have now adopted the term mvôn, "initiated," to denote church members. Formerly, one became mvôn after initiation, mostly in the great national so initiation, the members of which were called monewôsô (probably "child of the death /la mort/ of the sô"; compare this with the joking relationship, awusô • the dying /le mourir/ of the sô).

After initiation, that is, somewhere between the sixteenth and twentieth year, a young man though of military age was not yet a nya môtô, a true person. This he became only upon marriage, when he attained what might be considered his legal, civil, even economic, majority.

A girl, ngon, who became ngal or nya ngal, a true woman, by losing her virginity, after marriage was nya minga, a /married/ lady, and ésila or ékua, a matron, when she had brought up her first children. A man with grandchildren was ntole môt, an elder, usually around forty; this was the highest possible social position. Indeed,

an old man, nnôm môt, who lived too long lost his prestige as he became decrepit. It seems probable that during the great migrations old people, particularly feeble old women, were abandoned in the forest when a village moved its site. Certainly death must often have come before the infirmities of age, from fighting, hunting, or the first serious illness. My informants were always unanimous in telling me that the skull of an infirm or senile old man could not be used in the bièri cult.

With the second generation of descendants, a man, alive or dead, inevitably becomes émvam, a forefather, in the double sense of grandfather and ancestor.

An age grade covers about three years: this is about the longest possible stretch of time during which two children born on different dates can both be at the breast together, and it was approximately the interval separating two large collective initiation ceremonies. Classificatory kinship groups people by generation: all those of one generation are bobenyañ, brothers, as mentioned above. Within an age grade the term éjula, "comrade," is more apt to be used. The succession of age grades created an internal hierarchy within the generation and strengthened the clan and tribal ties between the bijula. This strengthening was even more marked between the bo'bewôô of the same time of initiation.

Modern life alters these ties, as much from the dying out or transformation of the initiations as from the loosening of ties in the extended family and also from the greater mobility of individuals and limited families. The little Fang boy born at Fort-Lamy, where his father is postal agent, scarcely feels himself to be the éjula of his clan monyañ born on the same day at Libreville. Economic and political development tends more and more to set up hierarchies founded more on occupation, wealth, even education, rather than on age and rank in the family. /58/

4. Slavery, Castes, Classes, Chiefdoms

Largeau spoke of the Pahouin as of a "people who have no synonym for our words 'king,' 'master,' 'servant,' 'workman,' 'slave.'" It is a fine phrase, but it only partially corresponds to reality. Largeau himself, in his encyclopedia, translates the word "slave" as nsagha, a loan word from Gabonese (Mpongwé), he says. Further north, people

Distribution by Age

Age Group	Elected Municipal Councilors	Total Adult Male Population (1) (Nyong-and-Sanaga)
	Percent	Percent
20 to 30 years	9	26
30 to 40	33	29
40 to 50	37	28
Over 50	20	15

1. Evaluation made according to censuses established by the subdivisions; the documentation is not faultless but nevertheless is indicative.

The figures given below for the whole population are not definitive, but as they have been taken from a recent complete census they may be considered good approximations.

Distribution of External Signs of Wealth
(for 100 persons)

	Masonry Houses	Bicycles	Automobiles
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Municipal councilors	27	50	11
Adult male population of Ebolowa	1.4	21	0.3

Not for nothing do the Pahouin use the word nkukuma (rich) to designate a chief. The chosen leaders are the rich men. /133/

A study of the matrimonial situation enables us to be more specific about the personal characteristics of elected men. Polygamy is much more common among them than among the population as a whole.